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ABSTRACT

Cultural differences between the American (dominant) and Hispanic (minority) cultures and inadequate mastery of the English language are the most salient problems in measuring psychological adjustment among Hispanics in the United States. Some dimensions of psychological adjustment (perception of reality, anxiety, self-esteem, depression, environmental mastery, anger) are relevant to both the dominant and the Hispanic cultures. There are some psychological instruments appropriate to measure these dimensions without cultural bias. Any psychological instrument should not be selected solely on the basis of validity and reliability. An additional consideration is the availability of the instrument in Spanish and the equivalence of that translated instrument in both languages. Failure to use equivalent versions may result in different means, variances, and norms. (Author/JAC)

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The Measurement of Psychological Adjustment in Hispanics

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Measurement of Psychological Adjustment in Hispanics

The measurement of psychological adjustment (mental health) of Hispanics merits certain special considerations. This paper is primarily concerned with the assessment of relatively normal, non-psychopathological groups of Hispanics. Dimensions of psychological adjustment having greatest relevance for Hispanic groups are selected and discussed. Specific scales to measure the various dimensions are discussed with regard to their appropriateness with Hispanic groups. Problems in the assessment of psychological adjustment, both on an individual basis and for research (often group) purposes, will be considered.

What is viewed as normal and abnormal by various cultures may differ (e.g., Anastasi, 1958; Buss, 1966; Wegrocki, 1939), and different cultures may accept and encourage varying degrees of emotional expression. This latter fact may cause a problem for any self-report inventory since there is a tendency to respond in a socially desirable fashion.

With respect to language, Hispanics in this country often are unable to speak and/or write English. Often, neither language is written or spoken well. As applied to the measurement of psychological adjustment of Hispanics, one cannot address this problem by simply translating the instrument into Spanish. One must also demonstrate the equivalence of the Spanish and English versions of the test with attention to some rather specific methodological considerations.

Some Important Dimensions of Psychological Adjustment in Hispanics

Mental health/illness is a concept usually defined behaviorally with reference to symptoms or lack thereof. Although there are diverse definitions of mental health, one of the most general is that of the World Health Organization which defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." (Coleman, 1972, p. 16; cf Jahoda, 1958, p. 18). More recently, "psychological adjustment" seems to be preferred over "mental health" but the two terms may be used interchangeably.

The specific criteria, dimensions, or aspects of psychological adjustment selected here are based not only on the literature, but also on the dimensions believed to be relevant across Hispanic subcultures. The selection is based on knowledge and understanding of the problems faced by Hispanic minorities within the dominant culture. Contact with reality, anxiety, self-esteem, depression, environmental mastery, and anger merit serious consideration as important dimensions in the assessment of psychological adjustment among Hispanics.

For each dimension many of the available and well-known instruments were considered; a select few of these instruments will be discussed. Psychological instruments should not be selected solely on the basis of validity and reliability. An additional important consideration is the availability of the instrument in Spanish and the equivalence of that translated instrument in both languages. The importance of equivalence may

best be understood by consideration of the consequences of failure to use equivalent versions. Failure to use equivalent versions may result in different means, variances, and norms for the two versions. Increased variability of the scores and consequent greater error variance will result in greater difficulty in obtaining significant findings. Different means in the two versions may result in erroneous conclusions, particularly for reseach purposes. A problem is also present in individual administration when an individual's performance is compared with norms.

Perception of Reality. Good perception of reality is perhaps the most basic indication of good psychological adjustment (positive mental health) and has been emphasized by Janoda (1958), Fromm (1955), and Buss (1966). Persons with good psychological adjustment should be free from any thought disorder and should perceive reality accurately and relatively independent of what they wish things might be. Intense and excessive degrees of stress, more likely to be experienced by minority group members, might result in poor reality contact.

An instrument of choice to measure reality contact is Steiner and Harrower's (Harrower, 1950) multiple choice form of the Rorschach. It may be awkward to administer in an interview setting, not so much because of length but more because the Rorschach cards themselves must be presented. Furthermore, there may be some problems involved in translation of the approximately 30 items which are the possible responses to each card.

The MMPI has been commonly used in Spanish, but the instrument, intended for abnormal populations, tends to "pull" psychopathology in those deeply immersed in spiritualism, a common belief in many Hispanic subcultures.

While reality contact is certainly an important dimension, it is difficult to find an adequate instrument to measure this dimension even among those proficient in English. The problem is only compounded in non-English speaking Hispanics. This dimension might be better tapped via interview and behavioral observation instead of with psychological tests.

Anxiety. Freedom from incapacitating anxiety and unrealistic fears is an important criterion of psychological adjustment. The combination of stresses likely to be encountered by a minority group member could result in increased anxiety.

The A-Trait scale of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI; Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970) is currently the instrument of choice in measuring anxiety. A Spanish edition of the STAI has been developed (Spielberger et al., 1971) and the instrument has been extensively used with Spanish-speaking persons (e.g., Martinez-Urrutia & Spielberger, 1973). Spielberger has recently revised the A-Trait Scale and included it as one of three scales in the State-Trait Personality Inventory (STPI; Spielberger, in press). The development of an equivalent Spanish version of the STPI is planned by the Spielberger group under the leadership of Dr. Hector Gonzalez.

Self-Esteem. The ability to understand and accept one's own feelings is an aspect of psychological adjustment emphasized by Keezer (1971). The well-adjusted person has an attitude toward self which includes acceptance of weakness and pride in strength. The minority person may experience lower self-esteem because of the treatment at the hands of the dominant culture, because of the failure to attain the goals which are valued in the dominant culture, and because self definition may be largely determined by the negative view that the majority may have of the minority.

A traditional method of assessing self-esteem is to compare the person's self-description with the same person's description of the ideal person of the same sex and age. This has been done using the Q-sort technique, which is too unwieldy and time consuming for most purposes. Furthermore, it becomes even more laborious when one must also obtain a statistical measure of the relationship between real and ideal self for each subject.

The Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) of Everett Shostrom (1974) has two germane scales, the self regard and the self acceptance scales. Self regard is the acceptance of self because of worth or strength while self acceptance is the affirmation of self in spite of weakness. These two aspects of self-esteem seem to fit in very well with Jahoda's (1958) identification of categories or parameters of mental health which were presented in a report to the Joint Commission on Mental Illness and Health. The POI is available in Spanish and the instrument has been used extensively in cross-cultural work. The methodology used in the

development of the Spanish version is not known, even after consultation with the director of the translation project, hence no statement regarding the equivalence of the two forms can be made.

Depression. An important criterion of psychological adjustment is the absence of prolonged depression (e.g., Boehm, 1955; Menninger, 1945). In the case of the psychological adjustment of Hispanic minorities, prejudice and discrimination may operate to engender feelings of worthlessness. If opportunities for advancement are blocked because of discrimination, the individual may direct the anger inwardly rather than toward the source of the frustration; hence, feelings of depression.

Zung's (1974) Self-Rating Depression Scale(SDS) is a neat, brief instrument which is available in Spanish. It would seem to provide a good measure of depression, depending on the instructions used, despite some shortcomings in test-retest reliability. It has been used extensively in Spanish and in many cultures, including Hispanic subcultures.

The Depression scale of the MMPI and other commonly-used depression measures (e.g., Beck, Lubin) may not be appropriate for Hispanics.

Environmental Mastery. Psychological adjustment has been defined as a sense of identity based on one's experience of self as the subject and agent of one's own power (Fromm, 1955). An area of human functioning that has been selected more frequently

as a criterion of mental health is mastery of the environment (Jahoda, 1958).

It is important that the person be able to master the environment by adapting to current circumstances and by drawing satisfaction from his or her environment. If a person does not believe that he or she can be an efficacious human being, then the person probably is not well adjusted.

Locus of control, an expectancy regarding degree of control over one's reenforcers is synonomous with environmental mastery. Locus of control, an especially important variable among minorities and the poor, has been related to ethnic and socioeconomic variables by Lefcourt (1966):

> In all of the reported ethnic studies, groups whose social position is one of minimal power either by class or race tend to score higher in the external-control direction. Within the racial groupings, class interacts so that the double handicap of lower-class and "lower-caste" seems to produce persons with the highest expectancy of external control. Perhaps the apathy and what is often described as lower-class lack of motivation to achieve may be explained as a result of the disbelief that effort pays off. (p. 212).

As a cultural group, Hispanics come from traditions in which fate and Espiritismo (spiritualism) play an important part. Espiritismo is the belief that the visible world is surrounded by an invisible world inhabited by spirits. Psychological problems

and certain physical illnesses are thought to be caused by "bad" spirits that penetrate the visible world and become attached to human beings. Persons with these beliefs are likely to seek sources of help other than those found in standard health delivery systems (Harwood, 1977; Rogler & Hollingshead, 1961).

Rotter's (1966) 29 item locus of control scale is a good instrument to measure this attitude or belief. Major problems with this scale are its length and forced choice format. Other versions with items having a metric rather than forced choice format may be preferable.

Anger. Aspects of mental health emphasized by Keezer (1971) are the ability to endure frustration and the absence of constant conflict. Minorities are more likely to suffer frustration and despair. They may be blocked from attaining constructive achievements and may be higher in the characteristics which result from exposure to frustration and conflict. Anger might result from and be a manifestation of this frustration and conflict. The ability to maintain an even temper is part of Menninger's (1945) definition of mental health.

Miller and Dollard (1941) postulate a frustration-aggression hypothesis in which failure to be permitted to achieve a goal results in aggression. In some ways this experimental paradigm may mimic the experience of the Hispanic prevented from achieving the goals toward which he or she is striving . Due to the ability of our species to conceptualize, frustration also takes place in our society when promises are made but not kept. If significant

figures or responsible authorities (e. g. community leaders or presidential aspirants) promise to help in certain ways but then do not do so, anger (e. g., riots), may ensue. Society in general and social scientists in particular should be sensitive to this dimension in all people. Little has been done in the way of personality assessment regarding anger, partly because heretofore, no satisfactory paper-and-pencil instrument was available to measure anger. One of the scales in the newly developed STPI (Spielberger, in press) taps anger. The Spielberger group is working on a translation.

Development of Equivalent Spanish Translations

If a satisfactory (equivalent) Spanish version of an instrument is not available, it may be necessary to develop it. It would be well to consider the following methodological recommendations in the construction of a new scale (in Spanish) which is intended to be equivalent to the original language version:

1. The translator should work with Hispanic psychologists representing various Hispanic sub-groups. Butcher and Garcia (1978) offer numerous recommendations such as the use of the most general idiomatic structures of the Spanish language so as to be understandable to various Hispanic sub-groups.

2. Back-translation into English will provide an additional check on the adequacy of the translation and might suggest further modifications in the translation (Child, 1968).

3. A panel of bilingual Hispanic psychologists should be asked to review the English and Spanish versions of the items and comment on the adequacy of the translation.

4. Bilinguals with proficiency in English and Spanish should be administered the English and Spanish forms of the inventories in counter-balanced order. If the versions are equivalent in the two languages, then one would expect no significat differences in item means, standard deviations, and item remainder correlation coefficients between the two versions.

5. At all times in the development and administration of instruments to Hispanics, bilingual examiners should be used.

6. Cultural and racial differences between subject and examiner should be minimized as these differences may adversely affect the performance of the subject. This recommendation would be especially important with individual tests.

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Footnotes

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